

THE *TERROIR* OF FOOD WRITING: GENDER AND GENRE
IN M.F.K. FISHER'S TRANSLATION OF BRILLAT-SAVARIN'S
THE PHYSIOLOGY OF TASTE

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By

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ABSTRACT

What we write about when we write about food was shaped by the literary interplay between French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, author of *The Physiology of Taste or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (*Physiologie du gout ou, méditations de gastronomie transcendante*, 1825) and his translator, twentieth-century American food writer M.F.K. Fisher, in a complex relationship that crossed centuries, locales, and genders. They created a narrative approach to food that transcends the mere “how-to” manual, putting the concepts of literary and culinary craft into conversation with the personal, intellectual, and historical; they introduced the whole world of life and death as suitable grist for the food writer’s mill, and revealed the gendered world of food preparation and the writing that chronicles it. My examination of the multifaceted relationship between these two writers as revealed in *The Physiology* lays bare the equally complicated links between genre, gender, and place in food writing. As part of my examination, I will utilize the materialist analysis of bibliographic criticism to explore the 1949 and 1994 editions of *The Physiology*. These editions are important not only because Brillat-Savarin was an innovator in food writing but because Fisher was a disruptor, an interventionist into both Brillat-Savarin’s work and the staid, incurious, pre-packaged cooking of mid-twentieth-century America. I have therefore focused on the complex literary relationship between the two in order to assess the effects of their writing within the field. Food writing in a broad sense has emerged as one of the most popular literary genres of our time. Examining its core founders helps to generate a better understanding of the cross-generational, cross-gendered, and cross-national effects of their literary collaboration and of how those effects – on topics, tone, and the gendering of food writing – manifest in food writing of not only Brillat-Savarin’s and Fisher’s eras, but in the twenty-first century as well.

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I live and work on Treaty 6 Territory, home of the nêhiyawak, Anihšînāpē, Dakota, Nakota, and Dene people, and the traditional homeland of the Métis people. I live on land my family has had the care of for 75 years. I gratefully acknowledge my relational bonds to the land and to the People whose home it has also been.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my husband, Dave Margoshes, who learned more than he planned to during the time I worked on this thesis, and to the memory of my father, W. Paul Smith, who did not live to see me complete it.

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1. INTRODUCTION

What we write about when we write about food was shaped by the literary interplay between French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, author of *The Physiology of Taste or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (*Physiologie du gout ou, méditations de gastronomie transcendante*, 1825) and his translator, twentieth-century American food writer M.F.K. Fisher, in a complex relationship that crossed centuries, locales, and genders. They created a narrative approach to food that transcends the mere “how-to” manual, putting the concepts of literary and culinary craft into conversation with the personal, intellectual, and historical; they introduced the whole world of life and death as suitable grist for the food writer’s mill, and revealed the gendered world of food preparation and the writing that chronicles it. My examination of the multifaceted relationship between these two writers as revealed in *The Physiology* lays bare the equally complicated links between genre, gender, and place in food writing. As part of my examination, I will utilize the materialist analysis of bibliographic criticism to explore the 1949 and 1994 editions of *The Physiology*. These editions are important not only because Brillat-Savarin was an innovator in food writing but because Fisher was a disruptor, an interventionist into both Brillat-Savarin’s work and the staid, incurious, pre-packaged cooking of mid-twentieth-century America. I have therefore focused on the complex literary relationship between the two in order to assess the effects of their writing within the field. Food writing in a broad sense has emerged as one of the most popular literary genres of our time. Examining its core founders helps to generate a better understanding of the cross-generational, cross-gendered, and cross-national effects of their literary collaboration and of how those effects – on topics, tone, and the gendering of food writing – manifest in food writing of not only Brillat-Savarin’s and Fisher’s eras, but in the twenty-first century as well.

Brillat-Savarin’s book, a collection of aphorisms, anecdotes, and meditations, is regarded as a classic of gastronomic writing even though – or perhaps because – it ranges far beyond the confines of the genre and invites deep-rooted questions about food writing, its role, contents, structure, and purpose, as well as the society it reflects.¹ Despite his dated language, Brillat-

¹ Brillat-Savarin was not the first to write about food, although he was distinctive in elevating food writing to philosophical treatises. His book was preceded by a vast array of cookbooks, including late medieval texts such as *Viandier de Taillevent*, usually ascribed to the French writer Guillaume Tirel, alias Taillevent, and *De honesta voluptate et valetudine*, handwritten in Venice in 1475 by Bartolomeo Platina; a proliferation of Renaissance cookery books; and by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, books containing specific instructions on how to feed your family, such as Hannah Glasse’s *The Art of Cooking Made Plain and Easy* (1747) and Eliza Acton’s *Modern Cookery for Private Families* (1845). In her turn, M.F.K. Fisher, Brillat-Savarin’s translator and the other key figure in this paper, wrote about her views of the world through a double lens of food and memory, incorporating history, culture, politics, and community with human behaviour. She wrote with an eye to educating the reading public about the art of eating, how to survive a world war, how to appreciate an unfamiliar food such as an oyster, how to survive the death of your husband, and how to become an opinionated and independent woman. So among those writing about food, Brillat-Savarin and Fisher were rarities in their time, him for his curiosity and interest in all things related to food, traits that are reflected in the elevated “gastronomic literature” (Notaker 176) contained in *The Physiology*, and her for elevating that book and her own with her feminist perspective.

Savarin's popularity has endured: *The Physiology* has been in near-constant print since its publication, with more than one hundred editions under multiple titles and in many languages and translations, with a variety of translators. Since its initial translation into English in 1854, it has also appeared as *Gastronomy as a Fine Art* (1889 and 2015), *The Philosopher in the Kitchen* (1970), and *A Handbook of Gastronomy* (2010 and 2015).

In 1949, a new edition was published by the George Macy Company at the instigation of Mary Frances Kennedy (M.F.K.) Fisher, an emerging gastronomic writer credited with almost singlehandedly inventing the genre of narrative food writing (Davidson 303). Fisher remains an iconic figure to food lovers, but the genre she created was for decades considered too well-written, too "female," and too food-centric to be considered "just" nonfiction suitable for either the literary or mass-market bestseller list. The 1949 version of *The Physiology* included Fisher's translations, footnoted glosses, preface, and postscript. In 1994, two years after Fisher's death, Arion Press issued a new edition, textually identical but with different layout and artwork, and an editor's note and colophon. Both editions were presented as an artifact of writers whose joint effort was culturally and literally rich enough to support a costly production. The result: two books widely separated visually and stylistically, but jointly forming a significant nexus in the genre of modern food writing. In both, the addition and placement of Fisher's words reshaped Brillat-Savarin's work, and her writing comprised twenty percent of the total text, transforming her into biographer and collaborator as well as translator. But her footnotes also serve as autobiography.² Consequently, these editions produce an important literary *relationship* between two writers vastly separated by time and culture – a relationship that is the central object of my examination in this paper.

2. ON *TERROIR*

Decisions made by editors and publishers – affecting a book's content, physical aspects, and visual appearance – influence every reader's perception of the book in their hands and its identity within the literary marketplace, in what can be considered the publishing equivalent of *terroir*. The word comes from the French, *terre*, or land. Californian winemaker Randall Grahm contextualizes the winemaking term: *terroir* is "the precise opposite of nowhere-ness" (quoted in Fiegl). A *vin du terroir* (wine of place) has distinct characteristics connected to the particular: soil, climate, weather, history, topographic and geographic issues such as slope and aspect (orientation of the land toward sunlight), farming practices (including chemical inputs used or not), and even the nebulous "essence" of the vineyard where the wine was born (Fiegl). By extension, *une vie du terroir* is a life reflective of its origins and place. So by extrapolation, a book reflects its figurative and literal *terroir* through the choices an editor and publisher make in creating the physical book. Material elements – layout, font, imagery, format, and the book itself – thus constitute a book's physical *terroir*, or its metaphoric geography. But in the larger sense, a book's *terroir* transcends temporal and geographic limitations. Thus, material or seemingly para-literary elements of a text – a book's artwork, say, or the biography of the book's creator – assume an importance and relevance beyond their physical properties, and are integral to the complex matrix that constitutes *terroir*. So while a book is anchored by its materiality, its

² In a letter to her lifelong friend, Lawrence Powell, Fisher wrote, "I don't reveal myself [in *Not Now But Now*] as much as I do in an article for *Harper's Bazaar*. Or in a page of translating Brillat-Savarin" (*Letters* 73).

aggregate *terroir* is expressed (and ultimately limited) by the thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and actions of its creators – its author, translator, editor, illustrator, designer, and publisher. A book and its *terroir* thus serves as a material marker in the larger cultural and literary landscape, just as the materiality of cooking, from pots and pans to ingredients, serves to mark a cook's knowledge, instincts, and creativity. A theoretical parallel to this argument exists in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu, as explained by his editor, Randall Johnson: “symbolic aspects of social life are inseparably intertwined with the material conditions of existence, without one being reducible to the other” (Introduction 4). The *terroir* of books and cooking make this idea manifest; *terroir* as a metaphor is particularly apt for food writing not just because of the agricultural origins of the word, but because *terroir* has to do with the materiality and of-a-place nature of an object embedded in its landscape. This demonstrates how the ephemerality of experience and ideas is closely connected to their materiality, as in text and the stories they tell, and in the case of Brillat-Savarin and Fisher, how their contrasting natures are revealed in their writing and history.

So the question becomes a double-layer cake: what does the *terroir* – that very materiality, context and content, and the cultural/historic contexts of the lives of the translators/collaborators Fisher and Brillat-Savarin, as well as their on-page relationship – of these two editions of *The Physiology of Taste* tell us about the evolving genre of food writing? Most notably, we learn that Brillat-Savarin and Fisher created a discipline (dominated by women in later years) that is neither recipe collection nor a purely gastronomic recounting of an idyllic year spent somewhere unusual; they created a specific category that melds food awareness with personal experience and memory, intellectual curiosity, knowledge, literary craft, and history. This is memorable for food writing and its evolution because it opens the doors to topics that encompass the making, consuming, and appreciation of anything edible – in a word, the imbrication of living and dying.

3. ARGUMENT

My research and conclusions expose the gendered world of food and professional cooking and the evolving gendered limitations and possibilities of the food-writing genre. Fisher's translation is influenced by her feminism, gender, and the merging of food and personal life in her writing (as Brillat-Savarin does in some of his anecdotes). But unlike Brillat-Savarin's metaphysical musings, Fisher crafts grounded personal narratives – of women learning to be women, in service, cooking for their families, caring for dying husbands – that cannot be conveyed in the cut-and-dried instructions of recipe books or in philosophical considerations. Her voice is clear in *The Physiology* despite being limited to translation and annotation. The two writers jointly establish an important food-writing template, in which Fisher's gendered status is evident in the book's materiality: the text itself, in its layout and other material considerations, relegates her to secondary status, while Brillat-Savarin's authority and preeminence is reinforced. Fisher is objectified by the publisher in the Prospectus accompanying the 1949 edition, and is overlooked in the 1994 edition by illustrator Wayne Thiebaud's images of men enjoying moments of solitude. Their collaboration reveals gendering in food writing and in the kitchen, both home and professional. Fisher's subordination as translator and annotator to the older male writer demonstrates the cultural imbalance that historically attempts to diminish feminine insights and literary artistry, just as professional female cooks are not taken seriously (Druckman “Chefs” 29), and home cooks, mostly women, are cast as labourers in service of their family, bereft of any artistry. But Fisher presents a strong woman who finds pleasure in food, lives by her own lights, and will not be subjugated by age, social status, sexual innuendo, or masculine disapproval. Her

work anticipates the ways that twenty-first century women are finding acceptance, no matter how qualified and problematic, as food writers, professional chefs, and home cooks. Her writing can be viewed as a feminist reimagining – a figurative and literal translation – of her colleague’s masculine authority, by providing an impulse that attempts to ground Brillat-Savarin’s more ethereal privileged masculine meditations and notions. This extends the *terroir* of the book to encompass a feminist point of view while strengthening the feminine role in the larger world of food and food writing. What they wrote – he, ephemeral and elevated; and she, earthy and sensual – created the sometimes-uneasy, often-contradictory template for modern food writing.

4. BIOGRAPHIES, GENRE, AND GENDER

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin was born in 1755 in eastern France, a lawyer, *raconteur* and *bon vivant* with an abiding interest in science, especially medicine. But his life was upended when he was elected as a Representative at Versailles in 1789 during the French Revolution, where his conservative leanings became apparent when he voted against the abolition of capital punishment and the introduction of the jury system. He was elected Mayor of his hometown of Belley, but when the Reign of Terror began in 1793, as a royalist his life was in danger and he fled into exile, to Germany, Switzerland, and the United States, losing his home in the process. He returned to France in 1796, when as a noted cook he was assigned – to popular approval – to cooking for military officers campaigning on the Rhine. Soon after, he was appointed commissioner of the Versailles Court of Criminal Justice, then a judge on the Superior Court of Appeal. Napoleon named him a Chevalier of the Empire in 1808 in recognition of his wartime efforts to safeguard the citizens of Belley during his tenure as Mayor. Brillat-Savarin’s later life in Paris was peaceful; he spent his leisure time cooking for his friends and extended family, and secretly writing his gastronomic meditations, in which he refers to himself as “the Professor.” Eventually, his great friend, Baron Richerand, convinced him to publish, which he did anonymously and at his own expense in 1825. The book was immediately popular, and Brillat-Savarin’s friends were amazed to learn that he was the author. He died a year later at the age of 71 (Drayton 8-11).

By the time the 1949 edition of *The Physiology* was published, Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher had published seven books under her gender-neutral initials-only name, M.F.K. Fisher. Some were penned in the gastronomically-inspired personal essay style that became her signature (and the template for many food writers to come) and she wrote for high-profile American magazines, including *Gourmet*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *Vogue*. But despite her publication credits and lauding by the literati, she was not universally famous. Part of the blame can be attributed to her gender, and part to the genre she created – personal narrative essays about food. To return to his commentary on Bourdieu, Randall explains this type of artistic differential as cultural capital “legitimizing certain practices as ‘naturally’ superior to others and by making these practices seem superior even to those who do not participate, who are thus led, through a negative practice of inculcation, to see their own practices as inferior and to exclude themselves from legitimate practices” (24). The genre of food writing from the beginning carried lower cultural and economic capital than high-stakes literary writing because of the perception of cooking as women’s work (and therefore menial), and because it concerns itself on the surface with the everydayness of food and not with the so-called “higher” noble themes familiar to readers of literature and art connoisseurs. But early on, Fisher took issue with this negative categorization. In the introduction to *The Gastronomical Me*, published several years before her translation of Brillat-Savarin, she famously penned what has become *the* rationale for food writing:

[W]hen I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it... and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied... and it is all one...

[B]ecause of what honesty I have, there is nourishment in the heart to feed the wilder, more insistent hungers...

There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk. And that is my answer, when people ask me: Why do you write about hunger, and not wars or love? (*Art* [1990] 353).

Here, Fisher stakes her claim to being a *real* writer concerned with noble themes above and beyond the deceptive simplicity of food. Just as Brillat-Savarin's all-encompassing approach to food on the page reflects its integral role in his life, Fisher's statement serves as her argument even as it offers a fine metaphoric explanation of literary *terroir* – how life itself nourishes what a person writes. It is also a defense, a response to criticism, and an explanation. But it also positions its author at the nexus of the personal and the political in food writing.³ The fact is that in the 1940s, food in North America had no cachet and still appeared in “the women's pages” of newspapers (as it continued to for many years in some papers).⁴ This is borne out by several of Fisher's footnotes in *The Physiology*: she makes derogatory reference to “culinary atrocit[ies] that can be found in ‘women's magazines’” ([1994] 230), and recounts “luncheon club” culinary naïveté and sexism in an anecdote about a 1947 Kansas City food and wine event ([1994] 259). Food critic and author Ruth Reichl recounts Fisher admitting to her repeatedly, “I am not a food writer” (*Best Food* Introduction xx). She wasn't – at least, she wasn't *just* a food writer: Fisher's subject was herself and her perception of her world. As Bourdieu observed, “The true nature of the work of art is nothing other than the specifically artistic manner in which artists grasp the world, those infallible signs of his mastery of his art” (118). From the beginning, Fisher sought to elevate food writing, her process and carefully observed details of food braided into her perceptions of world history, geography, culture, and community. She believed that the specificity of her work and her understanding of the state of the world and the lives of others reflected her work's value as art, an autobiographical stance that supports a feminist reading of her gendered point of view and her efforts to uplift women's culinary roles.⁵

We can only guess at what Brillat-Savarin, the elderly admirer of beautiful women, would have made of Fisher. At age thirty-four, she was a beauty, photographed by Man Ray, and accustomed to the benefits of beauty (Gioia viii). Fisher sensed herself as different from other women (Gilbert

³ The notion of the intimate relationship and cultural relevance of the personal as political is explained in detail by other women writers, among them Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* and Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex*, both of whom “interwove autobiographical and theoretical writing to demonstrate that the personal is political” (Smith and Watson 6).

⁴ Food had no literary cachet either. Ruth Reichl writes, “As recently as the seventies, French chef and writer Jacques Pépin, author of *La Methode* and *La Technique*, who was studying for a PhD in philosophy and literature at Columbia, proposed writing a doctoral thesis on the history of French food presented in the context of French literature. His advisor turned him down flat. ‘Cuisine,’ he pontificated, ‘is not a serious art form. It's far too trivial for academic study’” (*Eating Words* Foreword xxiii).

⁵ This sense of her work's value forms an interesting tension with her later private excoriations of “MFK” in letters to her sister, Norah Fisher Barr, detailed later in this paper.

Imagination 149), amplified by her ambivalent feelings about women, and wives in particular (MFK *Letters* 64). I believe that the Professor would have appreciated Fisher's self-reliant feminist sensibilities (MFK *Letters* 63) just as much as her beauty (see Fig. 1). Mary Wollstonecraft, if she'd had the chance, would have warned Fisher that beauty lasts only twenty years (Gilbert *Feminist* 43): her warning was clear – old women have no value. This is especially true of American culture then and now, which is not supportive of women, especially aging or successful women who insist on living their lives by their own standards. As a writer and translator, Fisher fits the mould of “positive women who had creatively talked back to patriarchs, defied, resisted, in short been empowered through writing their lives” (Smith and Watson 7).



Fig. 1: M.F.K. Fisher, 1942, publicity shot for *How to Cook a Wolf*. *The New York Times*.

She was fiercely independent and held herself above many of the era's mores: she faced down society's expectations by having a child out of wedlock without ever revealing the identity of the child's father; she supported herself and her children as a freelance magazine writer; she took her children multiple times to live in Europe; she and her first husband lived with her lover in Switzerland before the couple divorced and she married her lover; she lived alone after her second husband's suicide, and again after she divorced her third husband; she taught herself how to successfully dine solo (*Art* [1990] 512-518).⁶ Fisher worked briefly as a screenwriter at

⁶ The gender implications of a woman dining alone in Fisher's era are fraught. The act positions Fisher as an educated, independent, self-directed woman with the financial and internal means to make her own decisions about where to eat and with whom, a woman who needs neither male guidance in ordering, nor male companionship in consuming, or male assistance in paying for her meal. Men might admire her but find her intimidating; (some) women resent her independence and ability to do what they imagine doing for themselves while others admire her.

Paramount Studios, which she called “the abattoir” (*Letters* 57), quitting in resentment of “the sterile creative life, living rather like a literary starlet, going to the right parties and so on” (*Letters* 57). Then she had to fend off movie producers who wanted to “discover” her for the screen after seeing publicity shots for her second book, *How to Cook a Wolf* (Gioia 48). A similar anti-woman culture was common in Brillat-Savarin’s era, as recorded by the Swiss writer Germaine Necker de Staël:

[I]t was still hard for women to bear reputations as authors nobly, simultaneously combining them with the independence of high rank and keeping up the dignity, grace, ease and unself-consciousness that were supposed to distinguish the habitual style and manners... men have deemed it politically and morally useful to reduce women to a state of the most absurd mediocrity (quoted in Gilbert *Feminist* 56).

However, contrary to de Staël’s account of wealthy women authors in the nineteenth century, the 1950s Fisher was not a woman of means despite her stature as a respected writer.⁷ Like the diarist Anaïs Nin, her role in literary creation paralleled her role in life through her ability to reconstruct the events, sensory details, and atmosphere of voracious moods and desires surrounding a meal. This remains among her most notable achievements as a food writer. *The Gastronomical Me*, written before she translated Brillat-Savarin, recorded Fisher’s gastronomic coming of age, but also delineated the limitless possibilities of food writing by chronicling the onset of the Second World War in Europe, observed up-close on trains and a succession of ships, and her loss and grief as she witnessed her second husband’s illness and suicide. But Fisher really wanted to set aside her “hack-stuff” food writing: she considered her 1949 book, *An Alphabet for Gourmets*, “a banal idea, but inimitably Fisher” (*Letters* 75), and spoke of her food-writing alter ego in the third person: “Do I marry MFK Fisher and retire with her/him/it to an ivory tower and turn out yearly masterpieces of unimportant prose?” (*Letters* 86). She wanted to write novels, and a biography of Brillat-Savarin’s cousin, Juliette Récamier (*Letters* 76), but after several unsuccessful attempts, she realized that her novelistic skills were not as sharp as those of her literary heroines, Colette and Virginia Woolf (*Letters* 73). In 1952, Fisher wrote to her sister, Norah Fisher Barr, “Re Fisher... the old girl is weak and gasping already, a genteel hasbeen... Should I quietly hold a private funeral? Should I give the coup de grace to some 25 years spent developing a minor talent?” (*Letters* 99). She never did complete the biography of Récamier, and eventually settled into a graceful acceptance of herself as the writer and woman she had disparagingly called MFK, writing about French and American food in her autobiographical and highly sensory style that melded memory and moment.

By the time she died in 1992, Fisher had published twenty-six books and was a culinary icon, the object of pilgrimages by fans. In his Introduction to the British edition of *The Art of Eating*, the English poet W.H. Auden observed, “I do not know of anyone in the United States today who writes better prose” ([1963] iv), and Raymond Sokolov, an American writer and reviewer, raved, “In a properly run culture, Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher would be recognized as one of the great writers this country has produced in this century.” Most of her books,

⁷ Fisher’s adult life was not one of privilege, but of privation, hard work, and close-to-the-bone almost-poverty. Despite glowing reviews, her books did not sell well, as noted earlier. As a freelance magazine writer and single parent, she lived within a perennially tight budget. The name of her sometime-home in California, Bareacres Ranch, was more a truth than a turn of phrase. After her father’s death, she and her siblings sold the newspaper he had owned for decades. Fisher’s share funded her subsequent year in Europe with her daughters.

including parts of *The Gastronomical Me* and *With Bold Knife and Fork*, were intensely intimate but emotionally discreet, with parts of her life carefully obscured. As in *A Considerable Town*, *Map of Another Town*, and *Long Ago in France*, she drew on her friends, family life and travels, her sensory experiences and responses to foods she cooked and ate, her curiosity, and her observations of the endless and varied hungers of humanity.

Before and after her translation of Brillat-Savarin, Fisher wrote evocatively, and always with some kind of tension radiating through her work. She told of a waiter who guided a formative meal in Dijon before she really understood what she was eating or drinking (*Art* [1990] 400), and of an obsessed French waitress in a tiny rural Burgundian café who served Fisher unfamiliar delicacies such as *truite au bleu* (*Art* [1990] 474-82), both of whom were instrumental in shaping her opinions and palate. But Fisher's North American audience was still largely devoted to Fannie-Farmer-style standardized measurement and an undemanding national cuisine of moulded jellies and chafing-dish casseroles (Shapiro 117); in one footnote to Brillat-Savarin, Fisher makes cutting remarks about her own inexplicable fondness for "barbaric" spinach cooked in a pressure cooker ([1994] 62).

Fisher was a vital contributor to a field that other writers were also working to define, writing about food even as those American home cooks were being influenced in new ways – by corporations producing packaged "instant" food, and by advertising geared at convincing housewives that cooking was time-consuming drudgery, that she did not really have to "cook" but could rely on mixes and packages and tins, thus demeaning the end product, the cook, and the practice of cooking. Cooking, to North Americans, thus became labour, not pleasure. Fisher spent decades trying to alter this view. As already mentioned, North American cooking was gendered: women were amateur home cooks and men were professionals. So some North American food writing became recipe-based and focused on dishes that utilized those mixes and ready-made ingredients, catering to uneducated housewives and pandering to corporations. But food writing was – and still is – a very large tent, and while Fisher was a rarity for her lyrical ability to meld emotion, memory, and experience without an overcoat of elaborate recipes or homespun wisdom, she was not the only gifted food writer of the era.⁸

By the 1980s, a global food revolution was underway, exemplified in North American home kitchens by Fisher, Julia Child, and Alice Waters, and in restaurant kitchens by chefs Jacques Pépin and Madeleine Kamman. Child changed the culinary landscape in 1961 when she co-authored two volumes of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, providing "the servantless American cook" with detailed recipes and instructions in French cooking fundamentals (*Vol. I* vii). Waters, a Montessori school-teacher, went to France, came home, and opened Chez Panisse in 1970 in Berkeley, championing what would become the farm-to-table movement. Sorbonne-educated and Michelin-trained, Kamman melded kitchen science, locale, and culinary technique when she wrote *The Making of a Cook* in 1971, becoming an inspiration and mentor to a generation of North American restaurant chefs. Pépin, a legendary chef, educator, and author, co-starred with Child in ground-breaking television cooking shows. Fisher became the role model of

⁸ Elizabeth David wrote *The Book of Mediterranean Food* for British diners struggling with "dreary" (17) food rationing of the early 1950s. In 1958, American journalist Waverley Root categorized France's food and geography by predominant fats – butter, lard or olive oil (9) – in *The Food of France*. As *The New York Times* food editor from 1957-92, Craig Claiborne wrote about restaurants and home cooking with technical accuracy, giving those food pages "moral fibre" that altered the North American perception of how to eat well (O'Neill 465).

a new crop of food writers, to such an extent that in 2014, Josh Ozersky, himself a food writer, clamoured for the late writer's dethroning, claiming that food writers' voices – mostly female, and what he called brassy, mawkish, spunky-sensitive, and pretentious – all came from Fisher's DNA, that "[t]he author will find in some plate of pie a memory of mother and, later, in the act of their own eating, a universal experience that binds us all together."⁹ Ozersky argues that Fisher's distinctive voice and "banal" observations constrained modern food writing, that mainstream food writing is dominated by white women of privilege who did not address the challenging, unsightly sides of food – hunger, obesity, diabetes and other food-related illnesses, junk food, and food's interaction with drugs. Ozersky denigrates the voices and talents of women writers for the purpose of making his point in an eerie echo of the misogyny in the professional kitchen. He also passes over writers who delve into food history and the deep dissatisfaction of diners disconnected from their food supply.¹⁰ By ignoring writers like Wendell Berry and Massimo Montanari, Ozersky falsely claims that food writing isn't concerned with social issues, a claim continuous with his misogynistic notion that women negatively dominate the genre. In addition, his view of the genre's prevalent style as "bitchy" flouts writers of many cultures and voices who owe little to Fisher's distinctive style.¹¹ Sadie Stein took both Ozersky and Fisher to task in her essay, "Serve it Forth," the first for "barely disguised misogyny" (quoted in Druckman *Women* 13-18), and Fisher for failing to inspire Stein to leap into the kitchen and cook despite her pithy, elegant prose. But there are other reasons to write and read about food than inspiration to the act of cooking.¹²

⁹ The women writers Ozersky was referring to were, in order, Ruth Reichl, Kim Sunee, Amanda Hesser, and Elizabeth Gilbert.

¹⁰ Ozersky overlooked Wendell Berry, the poet, essayist, farmer, and philosopher who for fifty years has addressed civil disobedience, sustainable agriculture, good farming practices, the pleasures of the table, and the interconnectedness of life. Ozersky also ignored Russian-born Anya von Bremzen, Italy's cultural food historian Massimo Montanari, Canadian writers Margaret Visser, champion of culinary anthropology, and Edna Staebler, who explored Old-Order Mennonite food, and British writer Bee Wilson, among others.

¹¹ While dissing women writers, Ozersky disregarded many good male food writers of the 70's and 80's, such as the funny and wildly irreverent *New Yorker* columnist, Calvin Trillin, whose *Tummy Trilogy* took readers along on his whoop-up American road trips, and Bob Shacochis, who wrote of his culinary courting of the elusive Miss F in unsentimental prose in his essay collection, *Domesticity*. Ozersky ignored the late Anthony Bourdain, whose raucous *Kitchen Confidential* not only championed a drug-fuelled "cowboy" approach to professional cooking but also demeaned women.

¹² In her Introduction to *The Best American Food Writing 2018*, Ruth Reichl points out that modern food writing is politicized and business-savvy, attending to race, class, gender, business, the profit motive, travel, and school lunches, among other topics (xviii-xx). She also observes that food writing now appears in a host of previously unexpected venues. The previous-publication credits in the book's front matter include newspapers, food-centric magazines and big-name magazines, but also *Lucky Peach*, *Garden & Gun*, *Thrillist*, *Oxford American*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, and *High Country News*.

5. BRILLAT-SAVARIN AND FISHER ON THE PAGE

The relationship between Brillat-Savarin and Fisher is a key to understanding food writing since mid-century, and in this section I will cross-examine the gendered landscape of their relationship as it appears in the pages of *The Physiology of Taste*. In her Translator's Preface, Fisher labels his writing "a singularly straightforward and unornamented piece of prose to have been written in a flowery literary period" (Preface [1994] 12). For example, *The Physiology* may be best known for its twenty Aphorisms. Some endure, relevant almost two hundred years later: "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are"; "The destiny of a nation depends on how they nourish themselves"; "The discovery of a new dish has done more for human happiness than the discovery of a star"; "The pleasures of the table... last the longest, to console him when he has outlived the rest" ([1994] 16-17). That final comment is a sharp reminder that Brillat-Savarin is an old man who has survived the French Revolution, exile, and the loss of his home. The Aphorisms are elevated in tone, illustrating Brillat-Savarin's position as a privileged French male, as he expounds about ephemeral ideals, not concrete realities, even though his *terroir* is the most material of objects – food. For example, the book opens with an Aphorism invoking the divine – and, implicitly, the dying – within the natural world: "The universe is nothing without the things that live in it, and everything that lives, eats" ([1994] 16). This succinct sentence portrays the act of eating as universally essential and meaningful while simultaneously opening the door to writing about death in a text about food. It is pragmatic, given that animals die so that humans may eat, but also seems natural for an elderly writer to consider metaphysical issues such as life itself. Aphorisms endure – their candid immediacy, wit, and tangibility stick in the human mind like caramel on a tooth; even as we laugh we weigh our lives against the small grain of truth they contain. Eliminating the extraneous is the essence of an aphorism, just as Fisher eliminates clutter from her writing by focusing on food as the narrow conduit through which she funnels her life. Aphorisms are small but vital. Thus, aphorism serves as a metaphor for Fisher's approach to food writing – succinct, witty, and a world of discussion contained within its strands. Likewise, aphorism – wit, brevity, synecdoche – is used by Brillat-Savarin to generate and reinforce the ephemeral philosophy within the material construct of the aphorism. But at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, aphorism in its succinct compression is also a metaphor for Fisher's function as she who grounds the ephemeral within the lived, material existence of a woman, and through that, her approach – *con brio* – to living and food writing.

Brillat-Savarin turns to death as he shifts from Aphorisms to Meditations, for an elderly writer a necessarily contradictory stance, an imminently pressing topic and thus a hard reality. This aspect of *terroir* offers graphic down-to-earth realism, more in line with what Fisher records so vividly than Brillat-Savarin's usual high-minded thoughts. Meditation 14, "On the Pleasure of the Table," begins, "Man is incontestably, among the sentient creatures who inhabit the globe, the one who endures the most pain," and concludes that fear of suffering is the motive for humanity's immersion in "the small number of pleasures which Nature has permitted" ([1994] 147). To this elderly man, eating well is fair compensation for enduring all the trials of the earth, thus simultaneously dignified and futile. Meditation 26, "On Death," begins, "The six most important necessities which the Creator has imposed on mankind are to be born, to move about, to eat, to sleep, to procreate and to die" ([1994] 215). This invokes existential questions concerning why and how to conduct ourselves during our brief time – and begs the question of the *meaning* of each of these six necessities, reminding us of Bourdieu's observation that art is an artist's reflection on their place in the world (118). It's the dish that is at once full and empty: eating's inclusion in Brillat-Savarin's catalogue upholds its importance, but also its ultimate

inconsequentiality (McGee 279). This Meditation, like his Aphorisms, opens the door wide for later writers, as does the concept of *terroir*, to a world of philosophical inquiries through the avenue of food. The implications are pointed: Brillat-Savarin's inquiries elevate food writing, as Fisher seeks to do with her rationale (discussed previously), both of them ushering food writing into the realm of the literary, and encouraging the cross-pollination of ideas – the riffs beloved by both Fisher and Brillat-Savarin. Fisher, too, muses on death in response to Brillat-Savarin.

Writing forty-three years before her demise at eighty-two, she predicts the manner of her own passing: “For myself, I should like to die like the Professor’s aunt, ancient and aware, at peace in a known room” ([1994] 216). In *The Gastronomical Me*, she writes of mortality as a “dread fact,” where humans are links in a food-chain, all destined to die, deaths for which we feel “tolerance and compassion” (*Art* [1990] 353) in acknowledgement of our earthy origin and ultimate end.¹³ Fisher – a feminist, living in 1940s democratic America – is acutely aware of how her bodily identity affects how she, a beautiful woman, is perceived. She makes efforts to ground the older, royalist Frenchman as he invokes the divine, the transcendent; she invokes those “dread facts” of death, making material his more ineffable musings. Modern food writers who skate lightly across less weighty topics would do well to re-read the Professor and Fisher for markers of the reach possible for curious and thoughtful writers within the genre.

But *The Physiology* is not just Aphorisms and memoir. Brillat-Savarin's Meditations on body parts and their utility in diet, obesity, digestion, fasting, and taste itself showcase his ongoing interest in medicine and the human body. This complicates his divine leanings and anticipates Fisher's efforts to ground his work in the material – the physical *terroir* that the body and food so aptly represent. Brillat-Savarin's stories of the Revolution are interwoven with anecdotes about friends and family – his beautiful cousin, Juliette Récamier, in particular – amid essays on the pleasures of dining, definitions of new terms like “political gastronomy,” praise for rustic bourgeois cooking, but no real recipes, only descriptions of ingredients, and meals cooked and consumed – writing recipes is for cooks, not gentlemen, and he reasons that “something better than a cook book should be written” ([1994] 27), illustrating his privileged stature and the *terroir* of his time. Recipes are a woman's world – they reflect patriarchal western society's determination that women service their families by cooking, as unpaid labourers. This demonstrates a world of difference – a twentieth-century working woman's necessity weighed against the entertainment enjoyed by an eighteenth-century gentleman of means.

Brillat-Savarin's writing veers at time into pedantry, rarely bitter despite his circumstances, but mostly wry, humorous, blunt, and plainspoken, exemplified by his comment that “Tis time to die” ([1994] 346).¹⁴ Fisher punctures his hubris repeatedly, as when she challenges his claim of being “fluent” in four languages other than French, calling it “somewhat ingenuous” ([1994] 29). The book is neither chronologically nor thematically organized, and the leaps Brillat-Savarin makes, subject to subject, Fisher matching him stride for stride, are similar to a poet's. They both write prose that promises plenty of space to pursue wildly divergent topics

¹³ Readers interested in a detailed examination of death and food as symbolic can peruse Chapter 6, “Tastes of Clay: The Many Courses of the Culinary Memoir” in Gilbert's *The Culinary Imagination*.

¹⁴ Brillat-Savarin's wit is on display elsewhere in *The Physiology*, as when he recounts going to court in his judicial robes, a pair of dead game birds tucked inside his coattails to ripen ([1994] 218).

in riffs. Riffs start with a common idea, then veer unexpectedly, spinning out the new idea, touching base now and then to remind the reader of the common theme and the original thought. As with cooking, this leap is made possible by knowledge and repetition in learning the craft, so the practice is grounded in the material. A riff offers an opportunity to puncture an inflated idea with a down-to-earth skewering, a grounding that uses wisdom, wit, irony, and all of the tools in a writer's toolbox. Fisher's discussion of automats and hot chocolate serves as an excellent example. In footnoting Brillat-Savarin's treatise on chocolate in Meditation No. 6, she mentions "Horn & Hardart's, those exciting frightening eating places which may last long after such literary masterpieces as this one are forgotten, because of their pure automatism" ([1994] 106). Horn & Hardart's Automats, the legendary New York- and Philadelphia-based coin-operated food-vending machines of the early twentieth century, served everyday food like pie or macaroni and cheese. For impersonal machinery, they were "thrillingly personal" (Shapiro and Federman), dispensing the buyer's choice of beverages and food from individual compartments via dumb-waiter to the glass door, which the buyer then opened to retrieve their selection. The automat died out in the mid-1950s, but while it survived, "it was as fundamental to ordinary [New York] life as the sidewalks and the subway" (Shapiro and Federman). It's an ironic scene – Fisher, the cool, self-possessed cook who loves the best ingredients, praising Horn & Hardart's mass-market hot chocolate in a well-heeled New York restaurant, itself "the antithesis of an automat" ([1994] 106). The tonal reverberations created by juxtaposing a blue-collar mechanized food dispenser with an unexpectedly approving blue-ribbon food maven in a white-tablecloth restaurant are deafening. When her companion tells her the automats dispense North America's best cocoa, Fisher riffs a how-to following Brillat-Savarin's hints, then ties in chocolate's Mexican origins, a Russian variation, Horn & Hardart's Dutch hot-beverages specialist, and "gobbets of whipped cream" to land her reader "all at once, in the nursery and a Viennese coffee house and ... Russia?" ([1994] 106). This *tour de force* of smart, witty writing gives the reader an unexpected dose of materialist cultural studies as well as a master class on the art of the riff. The parallels are clear: from humble materiality – words – comes literary art; from simple milk and chocolate comes transcendent cocoa. Incongruously, Fisher's riff begins with an automat, a regimented system that relies on standardization, mechanization, automation, rationality – the antithesis of her unregimented poet's approach to writing and living. The experiences could not be more different. But both are reflections of *terroir*, concerning food production and consumption, and foreshadow the culinary divide between artisanal and mass-produced food and the accompanying social, economic, and cultural rifts that food writers will mine in the twenty-first century. In this riff, Fisher appropriates the transcendent, all the while with her tongue caught firmly in her 1940s-era feminist cheek. Brillat-Savarin's tightly composed phrasing and Fisher's ironically witty ripostes exemplify what is sweet and bitter in living and dying, and in writing as well.

Beyond being a large-writ tale of life and philosophy, *The Physiology* presents the pleasures of the table to the newly emerging French middle class. Fisher, for her part, strengthens the visibility of the French middle class in many ways, mentioning familiar French literature, such as Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ([1994] 160), invoking domestic scenes, such as her French landlady's scolding ([1994] 182), and providing recipes for dishes that the Professor glosses over, such as how to cook carp after he has waxed poetic about fish stew ([1994] 85). Before the French Revolution, only the wealthy had cooks. When Brillat-Savarin returned to France he learned firsthand that the Revolution had changed more than the nation's political structure: it changed how people ate, and not just in France. During the Revolution, chefs lost their jobs of cooking for the nobility, and set up places of restoration, or restaurants, to entertain

and feed the paying public (see Fig. 2). Brillat-Savarin details the origins of dishes and the birth of restaurants with chef Beauvilliers, who in 1782 was the first restaurateur to have many things that are now *de rigueur*: a fine dining room, well-trained staff, exemplary kitchen, and above all, a well-stocked wine cellar ([1994] 245).



Fig. 2 Restaurant. *The Physiology of Taste*, 1949, p. 332. Artwork by Sylvain Sauvage.

Restaurants were vital to Brillat-Savarin. In a masterfully understated anecdote, he describes a trip on horseback in 1793 during the Reign of Terror to visit the local Representative, Monsieur Prot, to ask for a safe-conduct paper in an attempt to avoid prison and certain execution by guillotine. During his visit, he had the presence of mind to invoke Madame Prot's love of music by mentioning his own, and it was at her behest that he left the house with head still firmly attached and papers in hand. More telling was his response en route to the Representative's house: stopping at an inn, he spotted game birds and a hare roasting on the kitchen spit, and joined the diners, reasoning that "Providence has not completely deserted me after all. Let us pluck this flower as we go by; there's always time left for us to die" ([1994] 332).¹⁵

In her footnote, Fisher catalogues her admiration:

¹⁵ This translation by Fisher contrasts with Drayton's, who renders the final phrase as "I can always die a little later" ([1970] 361. In the original French, the phrase reads "*il sera toujours temps de mourir*" (Gutenberg), which I translate as "there will always be time to die." Fisher's rendition, "there's always time left for us to die" is closer in exactitude than Drayton's "I can always die a little later" despite Fisher's use of first person plural. Drayton shifts the nuance of meaning by altering the future tense verb-form of *être*, or "to be" in the third person – "there will be" – to the more forthrightly assertive – "I can" – changing the verb into "to be able" or *pouvoir*, in the first person. Then she alters the sense of time from *toujours* or "always" to "a little later." The overall effect is one of possibility in Fisher's rendition versus certainty in Drayton's.

It is easy to read into this anecdote, from the first casual sentence to the last jaunty one, most of the Professor's humanly weak and wonderful traits... he does not say that they were a typical pair of newly arisen politicians in a most unsavoury government... He does not say that Madame had bad manners... He does not say that she was a wrinkled old singing teacher... He does not say that he used her... And as for the dinner... [i]t is everything admirable about a man with his back to the wall who can yet dine and drink and sing with gaiety as well as good manners ([1994] 338).

Both pieces demonstrate that food writing supersedes the generic limits suggested by its label by revealing the characters of writer and subject, as well as the ethos and events of the era. Its *terroir*, in effect: this anecdote about providentially coming upon an inn, and Fisher's comments, unify to draw down the elements that go into the book's creation – a writer, a writer's life, the era and its circumstances, a translator, and the translator's own life. It also shows the magnitude of importance of restaurants as a nexus for eating well (and restaurants as apt fodder for food writers, as I discuss in Part VIII), and as a place for the mannerly, spirited conviviality that still mattered in a man whose life was literally on the chopping block.

Fisher footnotes almost every page of *The Physiology*. She provides biographical details of characters and events, insights into her own life in France, the occasional rebuttal of her elder, and off-the-cuff but authoritative recipes. Her tone varies from witty, dry, sarcastic, warm, or flirtatious, to corrective – “I hate to quarrel...” – but dispute she does ([1994] 27). She finds the Professor a delight, “his stylish mind most of all,” has “yet to find [her]self either bored or offended,” and enjoys his “tenderness and irony toward pretty women,” especially given his status as an elderly satyr ([1994] 355). In response to Brillat-Savarin's carving directions when confronted by a joint of meat, Fisher's sardonic feminist wink is almost visible, as she puns: “[I]t is the man of skill and virile prowess who has been the one to dole out what meat was mete for his dependents” ([1994] 62). In a story of her father carving a duck to prove himself worthy of courting her mother, she segues into a quotation from the nineteenth-century French chef Alexis Soyer's “sales talk about his gadget,” a tendon separator for inexperienced carvers ([1994] 62-65). The standards of masculinity encoded in Brillat-Savarin's image as a satyr, gently rebuked by Fisher, suggest that even as Fisher emasculates the Professor, she confirms the gendered conventions of a male providing for his kin, and the equally gendered dynamics of courting. Elsewhere, Fisher reflects on the irony of nineteenth-century prostitutes eagerly gobbling hot *boudin*, a type of blood sausage, in response to a scene described by Brillat-Savarin ([1994] 65). This scene works as a double entendre as well, suggesting a prostitute providing oral sexual pleasure to a man while simultaneously recharging her power and agency through an implied castration.

Elsewhere, Fisher's attitude toward sexuality is also overlaid with humour, especially in response to Brillat-Savarin's sometimes-contradictory self-portrayal. In response to his “Varieties No. 6, The Dish of Eel,” wherein he tells a story of a naïve priest who has his cook serve eel seasoned with “various exotic spices,” Fisher jokingly informs readers of the unsaid: perhaps the spices are potions to inflame the passions, both cook and seasonings having come from the kitchen of a famous former Parisienne courtesan ([1994] 281). In another anecdote, Brillat-Savarin recounts how he “sagged alone to bed” after a thrilling dinner of oysters while wondering, were they really aphrodisiacs? In response, Fisher calls him a “master of obliquity” ([1994] 298). In a largely unsolvable contradiction, the aging Brillat-Savarin reveals himself as both a sexual doubting Thomas and a hopeful believer in the efficacy of aphrodisiacs and potions – while sleeping alone. The subtlety of the anecdotes anticipates but also contrasts with the vastly

more explicit sexuality of contemporary food writing.¹⁶ This too, is *terroir* in food writing, in a very physical sense.

6. MATERIALITY

Inspired by the fact that books and food are linked by their grounding in material practices, here I use materialist editorial and bibliographic-style analysis to reveal how the materiality of the book, as part of its *terroir*, sheds considerable light on Fisher's and Brillat-Savarin's collaboration, and how their relationship functions as the template for contemporary food writing. In books, materiality distinguishes an edition, sometimes to reflect its historical era, just as cooking method, ingredients, and sometimes tools reflect a dish's origins. All of the book's physical aspects are integral to that grounding notion of *terroir* and add weight to a book's perception by its reading public – in a sense, shaping its audience, reception, and relevance. Meanwhile, the book's marketing team cultivates a taste, or preference, for the book itself, an even more elusive aspect of *terroir*.

Thus it is for the 1949 edition of *The Physiology*. The publisher chose Waverley, a 1940 American-designed typeface, a conservative but open and round roman style that is easily read, thus conveying the impression of accessible and bred-close-to-home familiarity, an imperative after almost a decade of war (see Fig. 3).

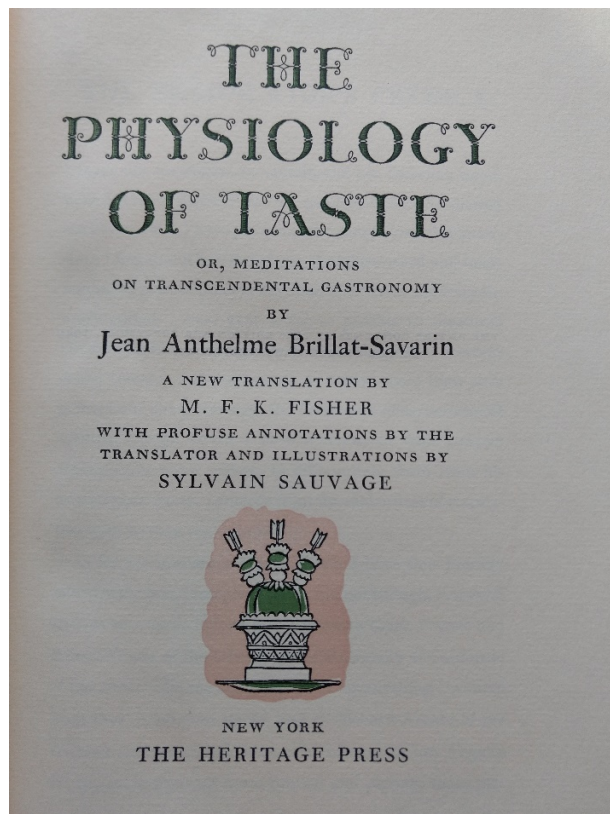


Fig. 3: Title page, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1949.

¹⁶ Readers looking for examples of contemporary sexual exploits in the kitchen can turn to Anthony Bourdain's accounts of cooks dry-humping on cutting boards of restaurant kitchens in *Kitchen Confidential*.

Throughout the edition, text is made spacious with the visual advantage of two points of leaded space between each line. The decorative large capital letters beside small caps at the start of each chapter suggest the six-line capitals created by medieval illuminators to begin sections in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (Caxton). The italic capitals used as headers evoke the post-war urge to return to the safety of the past – Fisher's fans wanted to escape into another era, even though that era too was haunted by war. All these decisions deliberately evoke antiquity, and are among the more charming print-related characteristics of this edition. Brillat-Savarin's stature as an esteemed elder statesman is re-created in honour on the page. His notes appear in italicized 10-point at the bottoms of each page;

Fisher's Translator's Glosses in 10-point roman are numbered in superscript and appear in a block at each chapter's conclusion as endnotes. Is this positioning a comment on her lesser importance – as a mere woman and translator and not the male originator? Possibly. But Fisher's two-page Preface is double-spaced, the only text in the book given that treatment. This significant variation recognizes Fisher's standing as a leading writer of the time, implies that her role in the book will be considerable, extends a short piece into something longer, and ensures that readers get the full Fisher treatment – and the sense that they are receiving their money's worth. But in spare language, Fisher compares her two years of translation to his twenty-five of writing: "That is as it should be" ([1949] vii), reminding the reader of their relative roles. However, in a letter to her friend, Lawrence Powell, Fisher admits that she "swung around to [Macy's] idea about a kind of marginal-gloss type of running comment, much I was opposed to it at first: I am increasingly aware that except for the aficionados, much of B-S is pretty tedious stuff" (*Letters* 68-69). Clearly Fisher and her publisher knew that her fame, not Brillat-Savarin's, would drive sales, but gender bias was deeply entrenched.

The restrained overall design elements make the book feel dignified and weighty, with a fillip of irreverent fun from the artist, Sylvain Sauvage (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 7). Brillat-Savarin – with a taste for wit as much as for fine fare – would not have disdained that description. But the 1949 design falters: in order to find Fisher's comments, a reader must look ahead to the chapter's end, and then hunt down the appropriate endnote, a daunting task in chapters where the lengthy endnotes number past sixty. Teetering between the separate texts can generate a queasy sense of dislocation and even forgetfulness of just what Brillat-Savarin is discussing or where Fisher's digression originates. Flipping from his observations to her responses some pages distant reinforces the sense of Fisher as a second-thought contributor, her work relegated to endnotes, a contradiction of the prominence suggested by her double-spaced Preface and surely a reflection of the misogyny of the times. So we witness Brillat-Savarin's authority as a male writer augmented by gender politics and compounded by the publishing house's willingness to trade on Fisher's name to sell books.

The 1994 edition of *The Physiology* contains variants that both reinforce and undercut the gender dynamics of the 1949 edition. It is crafted from paper made in France, with a typeface created by Firmin Didot, a nineteenth-century French typemaker and printer who, like Brillat-Savarin, survived the Revolution. The edition uses Bodoni for display type, taking advantage of the font's characteristic showy dazzle, generated by the alternating thickness/thinness of strokes and particularly evident in the thin horizontal lines of the serif (see Fig. 4). This fittingly represents how Brillat-Savarin wished to be perceived by women – despite his age. The typefaces and paper enhance the idea of Brillat-Savarin's value and cultural authenticity as a (male) French writer while offering proof of how a book's *terroir* can be rooted in its materiality. This book

reflects its author so thoroughly because the details echo his life, his time, his sensibilities, thus linking Brillat-Savarin and his era with the reader.

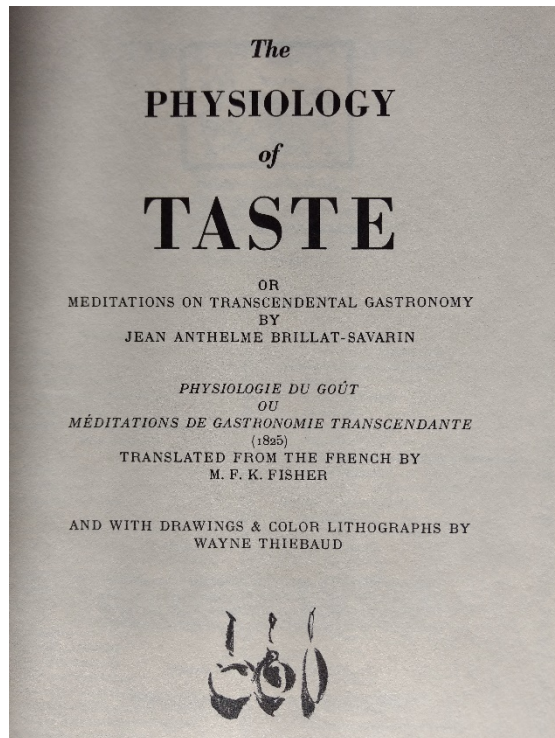


Fig. 4: Title page, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1994.

The Arion edition opens with a Note from the editor, Diana Ketcham. She focuses on the connection between the old man and the young woman despite their century of separation, calling their “artistic collaboration” a stunning feat of complicity that she labels “one of the most spirited flirtations in all literature... by turns respectful and brash” ([1994] 11). In discussing the differences in layout between the 1949 and 1994 editions, she admits that the more recent edition gives greater prominence to Fisher’s writing by placing her comments on the referent page ([1994] 11). Ketcham does not give reasons for the alteration, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions: I understand her actions to be driven by her recognition that Fisher’s name would propel sales. But beyond that, Ketcham’s actions in positioning Fisher’s words side by side with Brillat-Savarin’s have the effect of elevating Fisher from “mere” translator to collaborator and Brillat-Savarin’s equal, giving a louder voice to her counterpoints, and raising the profile of female food writers, a subtle shift in the rolling topography of the book’s *terroir* from the 1949 edition. As a result, the 1994 layout offers a better sense of the two main characters, as well as providing a graphic illustration of Fisher’s importance as translator and commentator of Brillat-Savarin’s work. This marks a notable alteration in the gendered landscape as a result of Fisher’s recognition, and indicates significant changes in how food was being written about – the “what” Fisher was addressing when she wrote about food.

The Arion edition’s layout features a narrow paragraph indent – two spaces – that erects a veritable wall of text on each page. This creates an impression of Brillat-Savarin as a masculine authority to be admired, revered, and trusted. Brillat-Savarin’s footnotes, in roman, and Fisher’s, in italics, appear in two parallel columns beneath the main body of text (see Fig. 5). This design

invokes the columns of writing seen on early manuscripts' papyrus rolls. Overall, these layout decisions create the sense of an old and important document written on a large traditional broadsheet. This sense of historicity evokes a certain gravitas, but a lasting side effect was to rewire the gender politics of food writing. As a reader, I felt more intimately engaged with the dialogue between the two writers, as if I was perched on a chair in the dining room with them, listening to them sparring.

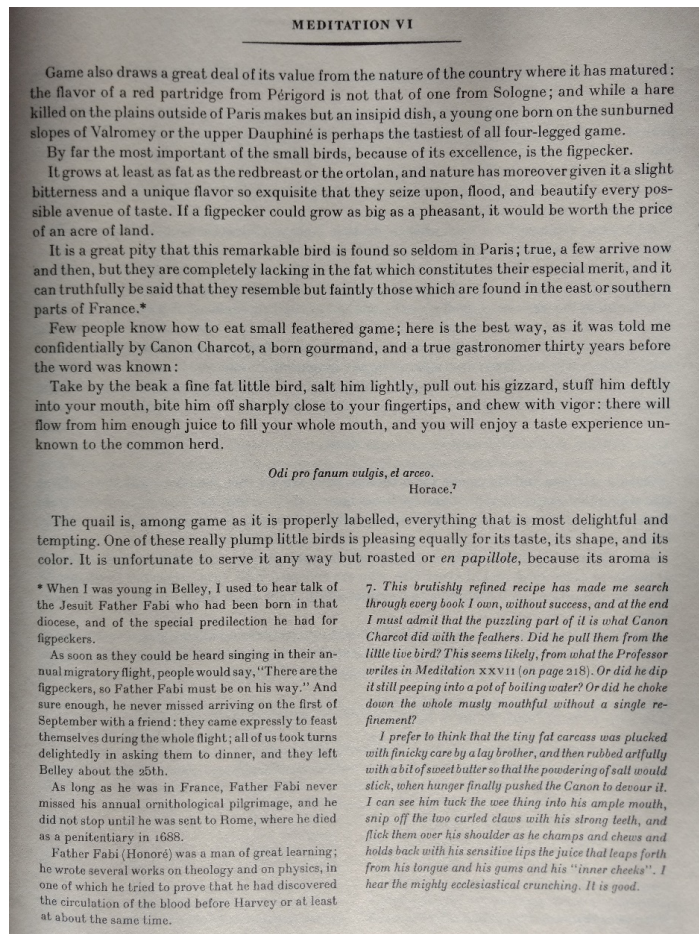


Fig. 5. Meditation VI, Fisher's (in italics) and Brillat-Savarin's (in roman) footnotes, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1994.

The result is that the book reads as much Fisher's as Brillat-Savarin's. The text reveals a woman's voice, one that would become a benchmark for food writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Fisher's autobiographical interventions into Brillat-Savarin's work are thus granted the status of equal thought and equal weight. This action changes the gender dynamic of food writing, and anticipates the emergence of predominantly feminine food writing in the twenty-first century, which brings forth the opportunity for previously-unheard feminine and feminist approaches to be heard.

Both editions were presented as culturally and literally rich, important and financially solid enough to warrant a prospectus in the 1949 version, and an imposingly large format in the 1994 version, adding a distinctive element of high-capital cultural *terroir* to each edition. The 1994 edition was a limited print run of 200 numbered copies for sale (price unknown), and 26

lettered non-commercial copies designated as gifts (*hors de commerce*).¹⁷ The text and drawings were printed by letterpress, and the books were hand-bound, housed in a blue cloth slipcase with a red leather label bearing the title and author's name in gilt. The type and illustrations were set within a generous frame of white space, like a wide border on a work of art. These attributes all enhance the idea that the book and its contents are things of value, designated for reading by people of culture and discerning taste. In 2019 a copy in a slipcase and signed by Wayne Thiebaud, the artist, sold at auction in the USA for \$5,400 USD (PBA), confirming the book's status as valuable art. Taste – that vague and movable landmark of cultural belonging and cachet – is how we ascribe relative value to music, art, literature, food, places, sports, clothing. But as Bourdieu observes, “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar” (2). So the ability to purchase a costly book proves not just good “taste” but membership in an elite. The 1949 edition was sold to members of the Literary Editions Club, who paid \$25 USD (about \$270 USD in 2021) for a boxed edition. The shelf-back was bound in blue linen, the title stamped in silver leaf, the book encased in a red cardboard slipcase. The laid rag paper, weighty and textured, was folded, gathered, and sewn into the boards. A matching edition in a red slipcase was simultaneously released by Heritage Press for \$5 (\$50 USD in 2021).¹⁸ Despite the fact that a less expensive version was also printed, the limited edition with its exclusive price-point is blatant “highbrow” positioning of the book – and of Fisher herself, the rising star, as well as Brillat-Savarin, the refined, well-educated French lawyer and author – as culturally exclusive, like a rare exotic bird available only for the appreciation of the gentry. This is borne out by the accompanying four-page prospectus for the 1949 translation, which was laid within the Heritage Press edition's back cover (see Fig. 6). The very presence of a prospectus speaks volumes about how the publishers viewed their project and its potential customers: a prospectus is often used to advertise a commercial enterprise, or stocks, bonds, and mutual funds, but not so often for a book. Thus the prospectus alerted its potential readers to their own stature as culture mavens and financial high rollers. So we are left with the clear understanding of this book as important, culturally and literally rich, financially solid enough to warrant a prospectus.

The language of the prospectus echoes the tone set by the title page's choice of adjective (“profuse”) used to describe the illustrations, and is notable for its exorbitantly patronizing and sexist language, all directed at Fisher, from the opening line – “You could say it was because she is so good-looking” – to its conclusion: “[A] wonderful new translation embellished with a series of witty and informative glosses made by a lady who is a very clever lady and (just incidentally in passing) mighty good-looking” (Prospectus 4). In between are repeated references to Fisher's attributes, which focus as much on her physical appearance as her writing talents. In a letter to her lifelong friend, Lawrence Powell, Fisher dryly comments about the prospectus, “You ask about B-S... it's been announced very flossily in the new Limited Editions brochure” (*Letters* 75).

¹⁷ A trade edition published in 1995 by Counterpoint Press as a photographic facsimile of the 1994 Arion edition sold for \$45 USD.

¹⁸ A first edition Heritage Press copy signed by Fisher sells for \$750 USD in 2021 (Book Collecting).

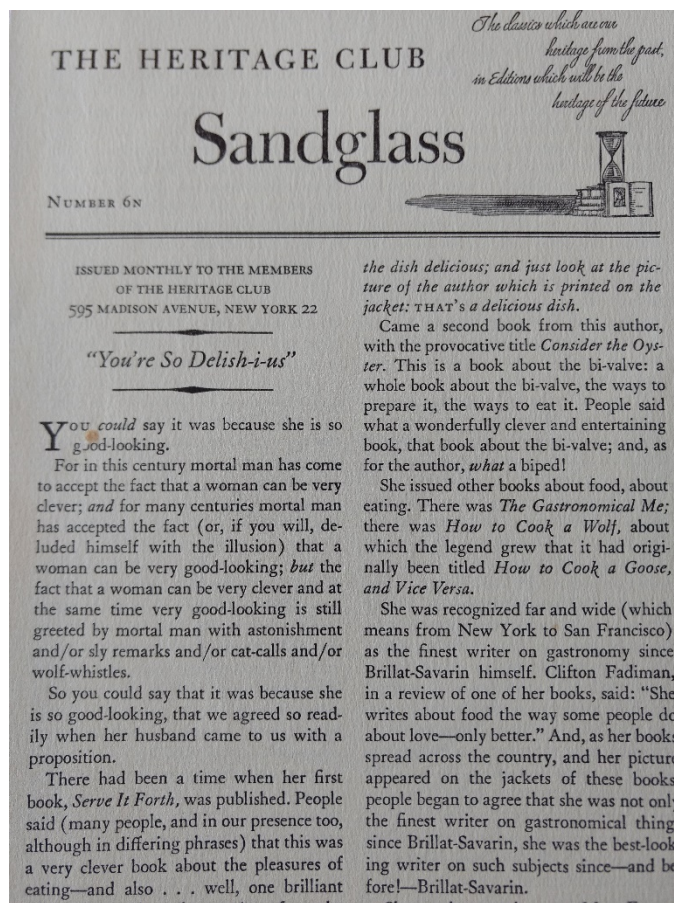


Fig. 6: Prospectus insert, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1949.

This book is thus positioned in diametric opposition to “the women’s pages” where food writing would languish in the coming decades, and elevates Fisher’s and Brillat-Savarin’s writing to the ranks of serious literature, or at the very least, expensive literature for the well-heeled. This says more about the literary community (and its high-finance audience) as a whole than it does about food writing itself: as Bourdieu would have it, “The brutality with which a strongly integrated intellectual or artistic community condemns any unorthodox attempt at distinction bears witness to the fact that the community can affirm the autonomy of the specifically cultural orders only if it controls the dialectic of cultural distinction” (117). In other words, deviation into another genre – such as food writing – is perceived as too different, thus not literary. Cultural capital thus factors into the perception of food writing, as is made apparent in the Prospectus’s appeal to its well-heeled readers to buy into a single view of Fisher’s identity as “mighty good-looking” and “clever”; any mention of writing is linked to her appearance and sexuality – “*what a biped!*”

7. ARTWORK: SAUVAGE AND THIEBAUD

When the 1949 publishers looked for art that would “deepen the reader’s understanding” of Brillat-Savarin’s era, work that was “simple, pretty in appearance, yet witty in content” (Prospectus 4), they used language equally reflective of the publishers’ opinion of the ideal woman and of Fisher, gendered language that reflected patriarchal notions of the *terroir* of the time. Ultimately, the French artist, Sylvain Sauvage, was selected: using artwork by a French

artist added veracity to the “Gallic, therefore cultured” (i.e., not American) positioning of the book.¹⁹ Sauvage’s images preface each section, and appear within them as well, becoming an integral part of the anecdote in the process. They depict emotion and situation, and are cartoonish but witty, with that streak of irreverence that characterizes the best editorial cartoons. The images – men enjoying themselves, alone or in restaurants, with no women in sight, for example – add another dimension to the book’s *terroir* and support Brillat-Savain’s masculine aura of authority (see Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: *Drinkers*, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1949. Artwork by Sylvain Sauvage.

The tone of the cartoons is fundamental to two eras – Brillat-Savarin’s and the 1949 publishers’ – and reflects prevalent attitudes to women while enforcing the notion of male superiority. In this way, the book’s artwork contributes to its overall *terroir* while foregrounding the conflicted terrain of gender in food writing.

The 1994 edition contains nine colour lithographs and two hundred black and white drawings by American pop artist Wayne Thiebaud, known for his paintings of everyday objects like ice cream cones, pies, and pastries. While some of his sketches seem perfunctory, others, like a full-page image of a male enjoying a private moment fishing with a bottle of wine beside him, reflect Thiebaud’s understanding of Brillat-Savarin’s privileged male-oriented philosophy of living (see Fig. 8). On the other hand, several sketches portray naked women in front of clothed men, and others feel barely related to the text, or seem incomplete.

¹⁹ Other artists, equally signifying “non-American” sophistication, were also considered for the edition. In a letter to Lawrence Powell, Fisher writes, “to everyone’s relief, Picasso can’t do [the art] because of other commitments” (*Letters* 69).



Fig. 8: Fisherman, The Physiology of Taste, 1994. Artwork by Wayne Thiebaud.

Thiebaud's minimalist aesthetic in these images reduces their impact and meaning, especially when compared to his other, more detailed work in this edition. For example, his portraits of Brillat-Savarin are fully realized, revealing the author's personality: the title page is faced by a black and white illustration of the author – a textured head shot reminiscent of a sculpted bust (see Fig. 9).

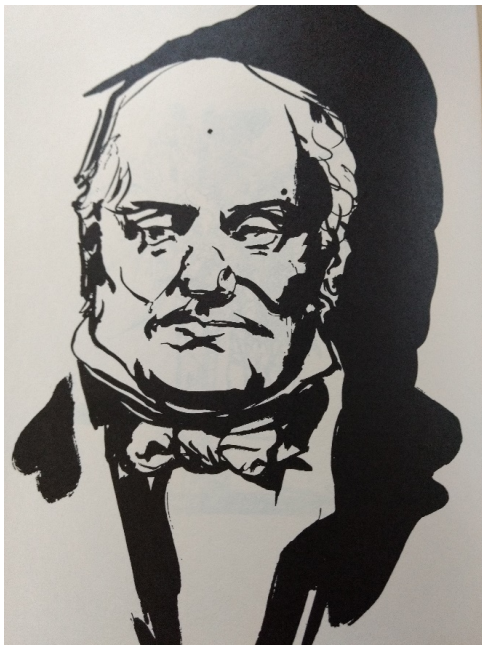


Fig. 9: Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, c. 1825. Portrait by Wayne Thiebaud, 1994.

It is grave, momentous, and evocative of Auguste Rodin's statue of French author Honoré de Balzac.²⁰ Brillat-Savarin is presented as a figure of authority, a serious thinker and writer, a "Great Man" to be admired. It clearly establishes his dominant role in the Brillat-Savarin/Fisher relationship.

As I explain in Part VIII, this portrayal of a male expert and authority figure will play out repeatedly in professional kitchens centuries after Brillat-Savarin's death, relegating women to subservient, maternal, or sexualized roles (Druckman "Chefs" 24-31). Thiebaud does not contribute a portrait or sketch of Fisher, relegating her once again to junior status.

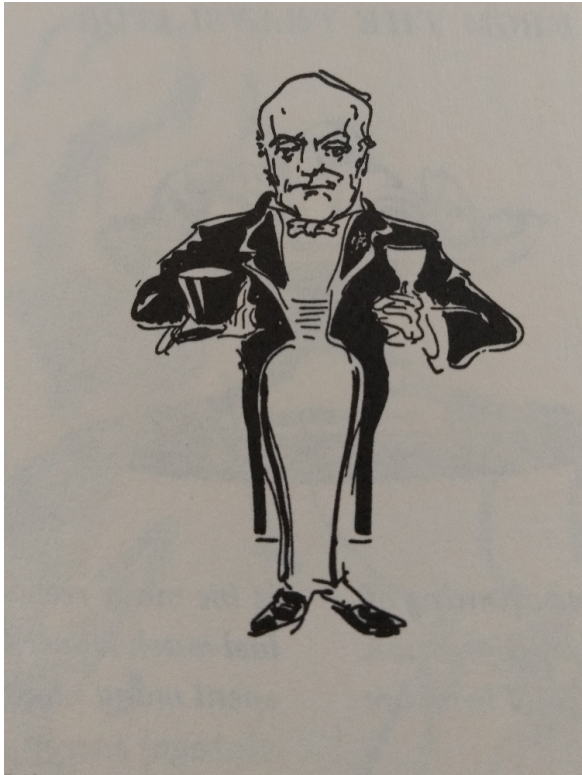


Fig. 10: Caricature of Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1994. Artwork by Wayne Thiebaud

The final page in the 1994 edition includes a caricature of Brillat-Savarin formally attired in tails for dinner (see Fig. 10). Choosing to present Brillat-Savarin as a cartoon might mean that Thiebaud intends to skewer Brillat-Savarin's nineteenth-century manners and mannerisms, or – more likely – that Thiebaud is skewering the class-based formality inherent in the convention of "dressing" for dinner. Brillat-Savarin as a "Great Man" of letters would of course dress to dine.

This militaristic, uniform-like clothing will in the future be echoed by the double-breasted "whites" worn by professional cooks and chefs, whose place of work is organized in a brigade with military connotations in command structure, gender implications, and discipline. So both

²⁰ This evocation feels fitting because Balzac was an admirer of Brillat-Savarin and used Brillat-Savarin's book title as inspiration for his own *Physiology of Marriage* (*Physiology* [1994] 355).

portraits advance the book's *terroir* while anticipating forthcoming gender dynamics in professional kitchens, which I explore further in Part VIII.

Thiebaud's and Sauvage's cover images have likely achieved mythic, albeit conflicted, status that reflects their complicated history in global dining and globalization. This status has arisen in part from the ease and profligacy with which French cuisine has become a cultural export – driven by politics, economics, and the expanding middle class's demand for the material pleasures of French cuisine and culture. Thiebaud's images on the hard blue linen cover of the 1994 edition consist of a single line of images: a steaming dish, a vase of flowers, a full champagne flute, salt and pepper shakers, a halved melon, a wedge of cheese, and on the spine, a cake. The front of the 1994 edition's dust jacket bears his colour illustration of a quintessential French bistro meal – a plateful of *steak frites* with a glass of red wine, a bread roll, espresso, cutlery wrapped in a white napkin (see Fig. 11).

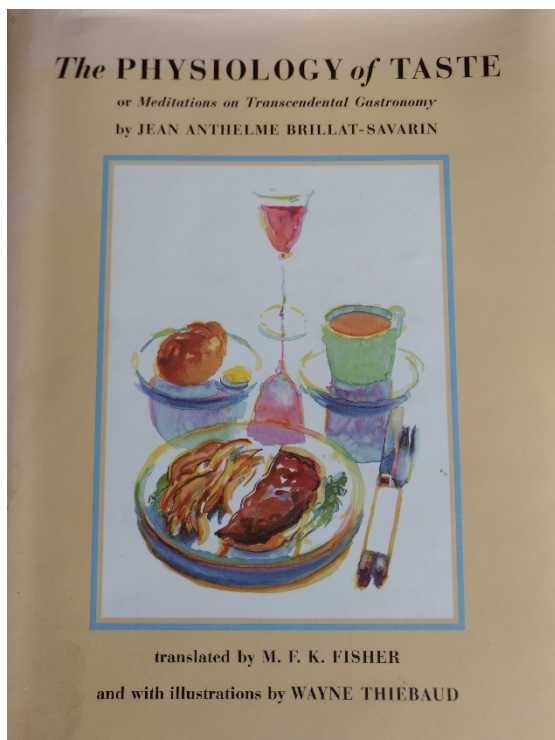


Fig. 11: Dust jacket cover, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1994. Artwork by Wayne Thiebaud.

By contrast, Sauvage's 1949 illustrations are outlines and muted watercolour inks printed from hand-cut rubber plates. An image of an elaborate multi-tier cake on a pedestal used for the title page was converted into a "step-and-repeat" lithographically produced pattern to adorn the kraft-paper-covered outer boards (See Fig. 12).

These images, with their cultural, political, economic, emotional, and social meanings, all strengthen the fabric of the book's *terroir*. Especially the cake, from Sauvage's work, and the bread roll, from Thiebaud's, mirror the potential for writing about politics, fitness, fatness, life, or death, all part of the quotidian rubric at the heart of a food writer's *terroir*. Beyond that, bread, and its aristocratic cousin, cake, are apt representatives of Fisher and Brillat-Savarin themselves –



Fig. 12: Outer boards, *The Physiology of Taste*, 1949. Artwork by Sylvain Sauvage.

their essential similarities and their differences. Brillat-Savarin is cake, leavened by air's whiff of the ineffable, the artful and aristocratic philosopher, writing treatises on life and death, his words embellished with an elaborate icing of nineteenth-century pomposity derived from his stature as an elite male. Fisher is a democratic bistro meal: sourdough bread, leavened by earth's wild yeasts and shaped by human interaction into a roll, the restless sensual beauty writing of earthy pleasures and bodily hungers, her work the very embodiment of *terroir* in writing. Her tastes – stated in other writing as well as in *The Physiology* – run to simple but unerring quality, so while she would cook and consume Thiebaud's *steak frites*, she would choose new fingerling potatoes, the meat a premium cut sourced from a local butcher shop. In this, Fisher's tastes, food, and writing anticipate the locavore movement of the late twentieth century, which is a philosophical return to eating as previous generations have done: a little of the best, grown close to home, simply cooked. But Fisher is also the feminist – and feminine – disruptor, the wild card that sourdough starter truly is, slightly unpredictable, drawing its essence and its leavening potential from its surroundings – its *terroir*. In this case, the essence is also the essential: without Fisher to translate, add context, and mediate his words for a later audience, Brillat-Savarin's ephemeral works might not have risen, and would not have endured to partner with Fisher's in becoming the bedrock of contemporary food writing. Fisher's simple meal would undoubtedly include a glass of wine: many photographs of her include a wine glass close to hand (see Fig. 13). Brillat-Savarin writes often about wine, from wine-tasting how-to's ([1994] 42) to the pleasure of sharing a half-bottle before retiring to more carnal pleasures ([1994] 128). He treats wine as a quotidian gratification, sharing an opinion with Roland Barthes, who writes that wine is the French "totem drink" that ornaments the slightest ceremony of French daily life, so the reader of the book understands they are about to enter a quintessentially French experience.



Fig. 13: MFK Fisher, c. 1980. *A Welcoming Life*.

But more deeply, red wine is equated with blood, and thus with transformative powers that allow a possible meeting of minds: for the working Josephine/Joe, wine enables the will to work; for monied and would-be intellectuals (the intended readers of *The Physiology*), wine is the social leveler that lessens the gulf between them and the working stiff. Even more importantly, wine is not consumed in France for the purpose of getting drunk, but for the “spinning out of pleasure” and as “the leisurely act of drinking” (Barthes 59). That prolonged moment of enjoyment is something the sensualist Fisher is acutely aware of and re-creates repeatedly in narrative prose that centres on memory, pleasure, and food. Thus wine, ephemeral and material simultaneously, has earned a place in the *terroir* of the food book and the world of the food writer.

So the cover meal Thiebaud provided in 1994 not only offers a thoroughly French experience but a culture of food that would have been mostly unfamiliar to Americans forty-three years earlier, when the 1949 edition of *The Physiology* was published. That bistro meal *would* be familiar to twenty-first century diners, as are the issues faced in food production: that meal’s components, and their status as cultural icons of French cuisine and nationality have all travelled as a result of globalization. The common threads are numerous, interwoven, and complex: the emergence of a global middle class that wants the culture and associated material pleasures that France is famous for; the economic and political will to reduce abject poverty in some parts of the world but not others; the increased mobility that accompanies an increased ease of travel and transportation of goods, services, and culture; but also the greed and willful blindness that have led to exploitive child labour, plantation-style food production, human trafficking in misery,

colonialism, commodification, environmental degradation, monoculture, feedlot-style animal husbandry and inhumane slaughterhouse practices, consumerism, and monocultures that ravage cultures, oceans, and lands. All are topics contemporary food writers are addressing, just as Fisher and Brillat-Savarin gave future writers permission to explore by their own far-ranging topics in *The Physiology*, and for Fisher, elsewhere as well. But equally important is the idea that Sauvage and Thiebaud chose images that resonate with Fisher's and Brillat-Savarin's world-view. Thiebaud's bistro meal, for instance – the coffee, bread roll, *steak frites*, and wine – includes the simple foods that Brillat-Savarin undoubtedly ate and that Fisher cooked for her family and friends, food chosen in preference to American fare when she chose repeatedly to live in France. French culture did not have to travel to M.F.K. Fisher: she traveled to France to embrace French culture. To some Americans, part of Fisher's appeal is her Gallic sense of self-assurance – that well-dressed and beautiful, stylish woman who speaks French, travels abroad alone, eats alone when she pleases, eats exactly what she chooses without any negative effects, appreciates the bitterness of espresso, and drinks French wine in preference to American soda or spirits. Fisher symbolizes Gallic *esprit* – that metaphoric bistro meal *in absentia* – and having that meal would confer on the 1990s American reader a French sense of style that was foreign to many.

8. CONCLUSIONS

As part of my conclusion, I will examine an area where the *terroir* of food writing has had considerable impact recently: writing about restaurants, a genre which needs urgent discussion because of the COVID-19 pandemic's horrendous impact on the restaurant industry. The business of writing about restaurants is one of the main threads of food writing two centuries after Brillat-Savarin first recorded their birth and attributes. He would undoubtedly recognize modern restaurants, in part because they remain mostly unchanged from the militaristic and hierarchical nineteenth-century model, but also because of the dearth of professional women chefs and cooks. The gender split is contradictory in the world of food – women feed their families the world over, but in the Western world of professional cooking, men are cast as the culinary experts and authority figures, as Brillat-Savarin was in his era. It has taken a long time for a feminist foothold to be established. Druckman's essay "Why Are There No Great Women Chefs?" describes how media and institutions define our understanding of what constitutes a "great chef" along gendered lines. She quotes food writer and gender politics researcher Gwen Hyman, who says that the common belief is that "women cook with the heart, men with the head – because women have hearts and men have brains" (quoted in "Chefs" 25). As a result, Druckman says, contemporary male chefs are esteemed for masculine-coded attributes that do not originate from culinary prowess, such as business acumen, celebrity, and marketability ("Chefs" 26). Women chefs are relegated to maternal roles – chef and restaurateur Alice Waters is revered as "the American mother of Slow Food" ("Chefs" 27); or sexualized cheerleader – British celebrity TV cook Nigella Lawson is often shown in a V-neck top, licking her fingers ("Chefs" 28). But personal experience tells me that women doing the arduous work of cooking in overheated kitchens often opt for the gender-neutral look of muscles and short hair, often devoid of makeup, and Druckman postulates that concealing femininity is one way to survive in the competitive, hazing-heavy world of cooking for a living ("Chefs" 29). One of the public's earliest exposures to the savage gender inequities of the kitchen came from the late bad-boy chef-writer Anthony Bourdain, in his 2000 kiss-and-tell-all book *Kitchen Confidential*. Bourdain's book was a game-changer. He wrote like a culinary Hunter S. Thompson, with a penchant for off-colour language, but he

displayed blue-collar sympathies despite his privileged upbringing, always on-side with his cooks, especially the immigrants, but never with the women (in his early writing). His gonzo-cowboy prose perpetrated the image of the hopped-up, hung-over, disrespectful, trash-talking cook, and spring-boarded Bourdain into a vastly more successful and visible career as television travel host – respected, respectful, and informed, if still prone to blue language.²¹ Then, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, when his girlfriend, Asia Argento, went public as a victim of sexual harassment by movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, Bourdain, who by then had a young daughter, first recanted his earlier sexist stance (Bourdain “Bad News”), then labeled himself a feminist (Rosner). Like Brillat-Savarin and Fisher, he revered good ingredients, their place of origin, and their cooks. That reverence, coupled with his frankness, down-to-earth demeanour, honesty, and willingness to try anything puts him in the game with Fisher and Brillat-Savarin, ensuring his enduring strands in the *terroir* of food writing. Television and streaming video have supplanted the written word as the media forms of choice in the twenty-first century, and culinary personalities like Bourdain have become more important and more visible to their audience. His bad-boy-turned-woke-feminist stance has implications not only for restaurants but for writing about restaurants, implications that could see an eventual reduction in gendered workplace hazing and abuse, improved working conditions, a reframing of kitchen structure with more women chefs and cooks, and altered tone and content in writing about the non-gendered and welcoming places that these places of restoration can yet become if they survive the COVID-19 pandemic.

These facts should raise the cultural, social, and economic capital of food writing. They certainly reflect a growing recognition of the importance of the quotidian topics of food, cooking, and eating, as revealed in *The Physiology of Taste*: as Raymond Williams says, “Culture is ordinary” (5). This is part of the magic of Fisher’s writing. She, like Brillat-Savarin, knew that culture lies in the discovery and description of lives, and the felt sense of the quality of life in a particular place and time (Williams 34). Then, by 2018, food writing broadened in a way that Fisher and Brillat-Savarin had foreshadowed. Food writing now includes explorations of poverty and food, the ancestral cooking of Black and Indigenous writers, food-related illnesses, gender politics in the professional kitchen, and the culinary influence of gay chefs: this evolution has been well-documented and explored by other writers.²² We learn our own lives in comparison and contrast with the lives of others, and Fisher demonstrated this truth in language that still inspires: James Beard, a pioneering and gay chef of American cuisine of the 1950s and ‘60s, was an outsider in the masculine world of the professional kitchen. He said it as plainly as Boston baked beans in his Appreciation for the 1954 edition of *The Art of Eating*: “M.F.K. Fisher has the effect of sending the reader away with a desire to love better and live more fully” (xx). This is a rare attribute in any writer in any genre. Twenty-first century food writing has finally caught up with Fisher’s early lead in this respect and now demonstrates an evolving social conscience.

²¹ Bourdain’s writing style was gonzo-cowboy at the outset, but in his later books, *Medium Raw*, *A Cook’s Tour*, *The Nasty Bits*, and *No Reservations*, he matured.

²² Readers interested in exploring the wide range of cultural and political culinary diversity in print can consult Gilbert’s *The Culinary Imagination*; Bourdain’s *A Cook’s Tour* and *No Reservations*; the annual anthology, *Best American Food Writing*; *The Gastronomica Reader* edited by Darra Goldstein; Druckman’s *Women on Food*; and *Eating Words: A Norton Anthology of Food Writing*, for a start.

So we circle back to the initial question in examining the book's *terroir* – its form, content, context, the lives of Fisher and Brillat-Savarin, and their translator/collaborator relationship – and what it tells us about the evolving genre of food writing. Without doubt there is something ineffable about a beautiful book, like both of these, crafted from well-chosen materials and filled with resonant words and carefully considered images. This I attribute to that near-magical ingredient, *terroir*, a culmination of the material and the intangible. I have discussed how every decision made by an editor or publisher affects the reader's relationship with and exposure to an edition. From typeface and size to paper, from white space to slipcase, from hardcover to trade paperback, a book is the sum of its parts, and its essence derives from physicality, textual content, and the lived experiences of its makers. Editors and publishers attempt to influence readers to a particular mindset, namely "Buy this book!" The 1949 edition is substantial and inviting to hold, invoking queries about patriarchy, patronizing language, and male privilege, while the two-column collaborative dialogue between Fisher and Brillat-Savarin in the 1994 edition offers a thoughtful representation of their relationship and raises other questions about the role of gender in their relationship – Who cooks? Who is fed?

Without question the decision to reformat the 1994 edition of *The Physiology of Taste* raised the visibility of its translator and boosted sales, in part by shifting Fisher's glosses from their previous positions at the conclusion of each chapter to the bottom of each referent page, beside Brillat-Savarin's notes. It also made a more readable book – a dialogue between past and present, a conversation that brings history to life and offers relevance through meaningful portrayal of politics, culture, and social practices. The artwork within each book reflects thoughtful creative collaboration, specifically in how Brillat-Savarin's personality and ethos is portrayed, increasing his profile and aura as a "Great Man," but the omission of any representation of Fisher lessens her stature. However, the deeply layered symbolism of the cover art on both books contributes meaningfully to the *terroir* of each edition, including the image of a bistro menu, which could be construed as a metaphor for Fisher's unpredictable and earthy disruptor role, and likewise evokes her Gallic *esprit*.

Regarding the evolution of the genre of food writing, Brillat-Savarin and Fisher opened the door for food writers to come, both venturing far beyond the limits of the genre's label and gender expectations. While Brillat-Savarin's writing may not be stylistically to the taste of modern readers, his range and willingness to transcend boundaries sets a challenge for twenty-first century food writers. I have discussed the widespread effects wrought by Fisher's intervention, style, her own ambivalence about her gender and the food-writing label, and how she too demonstrated that good food writing really is about love and hunger of all sorts, with eloquent side trips into history, culture, politics, grief, and occasionally even recipes despite their gendered positioning. The current contextual shift toward food writing as more inclusive, more politically and socially conscious, is helping the genre's practitioners do more of what Fisher and Brillat-Savarin did so gracefully – exceed the limitations suggested by its label.

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